

## no reason to run by hexicity

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**Summary:**

But everyone else is functioning. Steve is turning in empty tests and he's taking walks to places he's never been. He's carrying a baseball bat imbedded with nails everywhere. He's doing perimeter checks in his own home.

Maybe what he needs is exposure therapy. Like, maybe if he goes into the tunnel now, he'll see that it's just an empty old dirt hole. No bleeding kids, no interdimensional monsters, no flashing lights. And he'll be normal again.

## **no reason to run**

Steve Harrington decides that he isn't going to college. He decides this with finality on a Friday night, six drinks deep into a party.

He thinks there's something really beautiful and poetic about the fact that the party is out on the pumpkin patch. It's the very spot that had sucked him into an alternate dimension only two weeks earlier, and he still has the battle scars to prove it. Including, Steve remembers as he gets a refill of beer from a dancing brunette, a concussion.

He's not supposed to be drinking. Or partying at all, actually. But he'd heard about the party and after not sleeping for two straight days, he'd thought it'd be a good idea. He'd go back to the pumpkin patch, see it in clear party lights, realize that it's not even that scary.

It had been a good idea in theory. Right now, though, Steve looks around and realizes that maybe the alcohol is just making things worse.

"Harrington!" A voice cuts through the haze and Steve turns, accidentally making his drink slosh over the cup and soak a sleeve of his jacket. Her name is Liz, and she's really cool. Like, she's the only girl on the football team because she scored so well in the scrimmage that they couldn't afford to deny her a starting position.

She's wearing a crop top somehow, despite the November wind that relentlessly pierces the crowd. Her long red waves are loose and free as they swing around her hips. Her hair isn't unlike Max's, actually, but Steve takes a sip and forces all thoughts of the kids out of his mind.

If he thinks about the kids, he'll think about how he promised them that he'd obey his doctor's orders. And how he'd promised to tell them, specifically Dustin, if he needed to talk.

"Because I'm not stupid," Dustin had protested when Steve waved off the notion, "I know that teenagers get scared too."

"You're thirteen." Steve had pointed out. "You're already a teenager."

“Seventeen year olds.” Dustin had amended with an eyeroll. “Seventeen year olds get scared too.”

Steve finishes the seventh drink and officially pushes the image of Dustin’s pinky finger interlocking with his own out of his head. He greets Liz with an uncoordinated high-five.

“S going on?” He asks, admittedly impressed with his ability to enunciate. He looks over Liz’s bare shoulder at where a group seems to be converging into the edge of the field, and something heavy settles at the pit of his stomach. “What’re they doing?”

“Todd found a hole!” She says brightly, as if this is a reason to celebrate. Steve knows exactly what the hole is and exactly why they need to be avoiding it, but damn it, he really thought it was far enough to the edge of the field to not be noticed. “There’s a bunch of police tape surrounding it and stuff. We think there might be a dead body down there! You wanna come look?”

No, Steve thinks, he’s pretty familiar with the area already. But then he thinks about the fact that he hasn’t slept in two days. About how every time he tries to sleep, flashing lights and images of the kids laying in the tunnels, bleeding, pervade his mind and make him bolt upright and reach for his bat, occasionally pricking his fingers on the protruding nails.

He thinks about how his life has felt stuck ever since that night. Like, somehow Nancy and Jonathan are going to class like normal. And the kids are still playing D&D. It’s not like they aren’t scared, because Steve knows they are. Sometimes the walkie-talkie beside his bed crackles in the middle of the night, and he offers the kids some much-needed talking down after their nightmares.

But everyone else is functioning. Steve is turning in empty tests and he’s taking walks to places he’s never been. He’s carrying a baseball bat with nails everywhere with him. He’s doing perimeter checks in his own home.

Maybe what he needs is exposure therapy. Like, maybe if he goes into the tunnel now, he’ll see that it’s just an empty old dirt hole. No bleeding kids, no interdimensional monsters, no flashing lights. And

he'll be normal again.

"Yeah." Steve allows himself to be pulled across the field. "What's the harm in a stupid tunnel?"

"It's a hole, Harrington." Liz corrects loudly. "Not a tunnel."

The crowd is substantial. Steve shoves through it, giving up on politely asking for clearance and succumbing to drunkenly stumbling through a sea of loud teenagers. Interestingly enough, no one has stepped beyond the police tape.

"Is anyone going to actually look?" Steve wonders to himself. At that, every pair of eyes turn on him. With a groan, he mentally decides never to lecture the kids about inside voices ever again.

"Be our guest, Harrington." Someone says with a laugh, and suddenly a couple of hands are on the back of his jacket, shoving him forward. His legs agree to the movement and he wobbles forward, ripping down the police tape.

He holds it over his head, drawing scattered cheers from his eager audience that only grow the longer he waves the yellow ribbon of warning around in the cold air. He eventually gives up the dramatics and steps to the edge of the hole, the toes of his sneakers inching out over the chasm.

"Is there a body?" Someone yells.

Steve's head is pounding. He looks down into the darkness and remembers the feeling of that night, and it's almost like he's in the exact moment again. Except this time, he tries to remind himself, it's fine. It's safe.

The thought doesn't prevent the feeling in his stomach. Like he's on a diving board, about to jump into icy darkness. Like the diving board on his own pool, where he'd stand as a kid while his dad hollered at him to man up and do it. The board, his brain reminds him, where Barb was last sitting.

*Barb.*

Steve staggers back from the hole, only to be pushed forward again by bodiless hands. He's suddenly sobered into extreme clarity, at least mentally, and his newly acquired power of thought combats his uselessly drunken movements to escape. He can't even distinguish the swell of yelling voices, but the hands are still pushing.

Flashing lights.

He's being so stupid. This won't help, this will only make things infinitely worse. Nothing will help, not really. Nothing will just erase the memories, the panic, the fear. And Steve knows that. Even drunk beyond his mind and concussed to hell, he knows that.

What the fuck is he thinking?

"Shit." Someone's voice manages to rise above the thunderous yelling. "Cops!"

And then the hands are leaving him alone, and Steve just stands in his spot and stares down at the hole. At the tunnel. At the unknown.

Someone with a megaphone is yelling at the mass of kids to back away, and hey, Steve knows that voice. The yellow police tape is snatched away from his fist, reminding him that he's still clutching it.

"You're in deep shit, Harrington." Hopper says with finality.

He gets absolutely man-handled into the police car. Front seat, Steve thinks with optimism, but then realizes that it may just be so Hopper can yell at him more effectively. He waits in darkness, the sounds of a dying party invading his throbbing head. The red and blue lights from the cruiser are taking turns illuminating the pumpkin patch, and Steve wonders when flashing lights will cease to be a motif in his nightmares.

Hopper returns and slams his door shut. He slams his unused handcuffs against the dashboard. He slams his fist against the steering wheel. Steve winces.

"Chief," he groans, "volume."

*"Is this too loud?"* Hopper yells, inches away from Steve's sensitive

ears. He can't do anything but groan again and rest his head against the frosty window, which offers little comfort. The car takes off with a jerk, and now he's pretty sure the chief is just being rude.

"Need to get my car." Steve mumbles, and that only results in another slam of Hopper's palm against the wheel.

"You drove here?" He scoffs at the resulting silence. "Of course you did. Don't know why I even began to think that you displayed even the smallest shred of responsibility. No, of course you drove to a loud party and drank—how many drinks?"

"Six." Steve's stomach churns as he remembers the final, half-spilled beverage. "Seven."

"Seven goddamn drinks!" Hopper shouts to no one. Steve knows it isn't the drinks he's particularly angry about, but he's working his way up. "And you know, when I got a noise complaint for a high school party, I didn't think twice. Happens all the time. I thought, at least it's not my kids—"

"I'm not your kid!" Steve protests, a little too loud for his own liking.

"You are my responsibility." Hopper continues, no longer yelling but still thoroughly pissed and thoroughly loud. "You think I don't know, kid? I know your parents aren't home, and I know that even if they were you wouldn't tell them a single thing about what happened. I know you aren't sleeping—"

"I'm sleeping fine!" Steve interrupts. And then suddenly there's a hand coming at him and he flinches, immediately trying to shield himself with both of his own hands. When nothing happens, he cautiously lowers his arms and sees Hopper's hand resting on the flip-down mirror on Steve's side.

He looks at himself in the tiny, rectangle mirror. He's pretty sure there isn't a single shade of color on his face that should really be there. Definitely not the blues and yellows of fading bruises courtesy of Fucking Hargrove, not the deep purples under his eyes from the lack of sleep, definitely not the pale white of everything underneath from what has to be the general not-alrightness that's cemented into

his being.

He doesn't recognize himself. It's a wonder anyone else does.

"I know it's hard." Hopper finally says, his voice noticeably calmer. Probably because he's just witnessed Steve flinching away from him like a startled baby deer or some shit. "But you've gotta come back from this. Things are never going to be as bad as they were two weeks ago. We're *safe* now. Pulling a stunt like this tonight? It won't make anything better, and you'll just spiral until you crash. You want the kids seeing that?"

Steve looks away from the mirror. He doesn't need to see any more. The image of his own face, paired with Hopper's remarks, paint a clear enough picture.

"I get the point." He says quietly, defeated. "I didn't even want to go into that hole. I guess I convinced myself that it'd be like, when someone is scared of snakes so they put them into a huge box of rattlers?"

Hopper doesn't appear to comprehend the concept. Not enough late night television, probably.

"And I don't think I'm going to college." Steve blurts. He didn't mean for that to come out, but he's actually glad that his drunk mind allowed it past the filter. It's been weighing on his mind constantly, heavily. "Because I don't think I can leave this place. And I sure as hell can't leave the little brats, y'know, but then I don't think I should spend the rest of my life rotting away in my parent's house and attempting pseudo-psychology in a pumpkin patch."

He's so drunk. He doesn't know why he even bothered to offer Hopper such a mind-bending contradiction, and he isn't sure he pronounced pseudo correctly, probably not, and he's about to tell Hopper to forget the whole thing—

"You want to stay in Hawkins," the chief recounts slowly, "but you don't want to just stay. You want to make things better?"

"Safer." Steve says, finally gathering the courage to spare a glance at

Hopper, who seems to be, oddly enough, fighting a wry smile.

“Sounds a lot like what I do.”

He wakes up on a couch, and Eleven is sitting placidly on the floor in front of his face.

She's soaked entirely in mid-morning sunlight from the wide windows of Hopper's living room. Her hair is the usual mop of curls, unbrushed only because Hopper seems to be at work and unable to nag her about it. The television is on, but her back is to it as if staring at Steve sleeping is somehow more fascinating than anything cable has to offer.

“He was mad.” She says simply, seemingly unperturbed by this disruption in her dad's mood. Steve forces himself to sit up, not yet ready to entirely sacrifice the quilt he's been haphazardly covered with. Eleven smiles slightly when he inspects the bright pink blanket, obviously an act of utmost pettiness by the chief.

“I know.” Steve sighs, looking at her with resignation. “He ever yell at you?”

She nods.

“It's brutal.” Steve mutters. “Probably worse for me than you, though, huh? I mean you never got drunk out of your mind and almost jumped into a trauma pit.”

Eleven merely shakes her head. “Worse for me. Definitely.”

Steve doesn't even want to think about what a fight between the explosive chief and his psychic daughter would've been like. He gets up instead, groaning loudly as his head pleads for him to sit back down. With all the recent abuse, he feels like he owes this to his brain.

“You already eat?” He asks her as he sinks back into the cushion. She nods, pointing to the kitchen as if she's trying to show him the evidence of her breakfast. Not bothering to look, he lays back down.



“Good. I think if I stand up I’ll...die.”

The familiar crackle of a walkie-talkie interrupts whatever Eleven is about to say. She hurries over to where it sits on the windowsill and clicks onto an ongoing conversation.

“—bringing food, but what are you supposed to eat if you’re hungover?” Dustin is saying.

“Why don’t you ask your Aunt Sheryl?” Lucas retorts, bringing a small smile to Eleven’s lips.

“She made one bad decision two New Years ago!” Dustin’s voice complains.

“More like fourteen bad decisions.” Mike retorts. Steve watches the way Eleven’s face just glows at the very sound of Wheeler’s voice, and it kind of makes his body stop aching. The power of young love.

He realizes then that Eleven is looking at him expectantly. Because of course the little shits want to help, and of course he has to let them or else he’ll end up somehow much worse off than he is now.

“KFC.” He tells her, but she holds the walkie out to him insistently. Rolling his eyes, he accepts the hunk of plastic and presses the button himself. “Bring KFC, dipshits. I’ll pay.”

“Steve!” Three voices chorus at once, and he groans for the millionth time.

“Heard you acted *irresponsibly and irrationally* last night.” Dustin says, and Steve can just fucking hear the smirk on his face. “Hop’s words, not ours.”

“Hey, Steve?” Mike interjects. “Since you’re already committed to being a bad influence on us, can you get us into a rated R movie?”

“Shut up.” Steve retorts, which is the best he can do at the moment. “I’m about to fix everything I did last night to tarnish my glowing role model reputation, take notes. Stay the fuck away from alcohol, don’t even fucking get near anyone who does drugs, and Wheeler you should really drink less pop.”

“Screw you!”

“That being said,” Steve continues, “order me a Dr. Pepper.”

He silences the cacophony of laughter and yelling by releasing the button and hands the walkie back to Eleven, who seems satisfied enough.

“You know how to use it.” Eleven remarks, drawing a confused sound from Steve.

“The fuck are you talking about, I’ve used it before—oh.”

She looks smug. She definitely learned that one from Hopper. He’s being parented by his own adopted psychic.

“We all get them.” She says simply, and he doesn’t need to ask for clarification. Nightmares don’t need to be referred to by name, especially a name that seems so flimsy and unencompassing when defining the images that torture him every night. Well, except for last night. But he can’t stay drunk forever.

“You have to deal with your own,” Steve reasons, “and you shouldn’t have to deal with mine too. Especially when I’m supposed to, I don’t know—”

Protect them. Guard them. Be strong for them.

“Party member.” Eleven simply says, and like that the conversation is over. She turns around to face the television, and Steve staggers to his feet to make the journey to the bathroom. If the kids are coming, he wants to at least clean up a little. Look less like a terrible role model.

So he washes his face, scrubs his hands through his hair, and rinses with mouthwash. He looks in the mirror and notices that his skin isn’t as pale as last night, that it’s become a little more human overnight.

He goes to the kitchen to grab water, and there’s an application for a desk job at the Hawkins Police Department on the counter.

He fishes through Hopper's cluttered kitchen drawers and finds a pen.  
He uncaps it.

He writes his name.

**Author's Note:**

wow so i've never written for stranger things before  
but gosh I love Steve Harrington so much.

also, the title is from "No Reason To Run" by Cold  
War Kids, and it's such a steve song that it literally  
helped me write this whole story. seriously  
recommend it.

if u wanna talk on tumblr or leave a prompt im  
@simonlewhiss. thanks so much for reading!!!